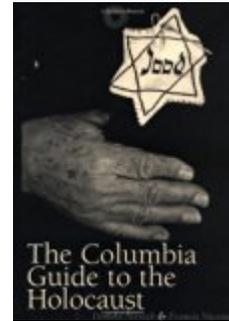


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Donald Niewyk, Francis Nicosia. *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. 473 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-11200-0.

Reviewed by Philip Rosen (Director Holocaust Education Center, Cherry Hill, New Jersey)
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An Objective Start for Holocaust Students

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The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust, authored by Donald Niewyk and Frances Nicosia is carefully written to give the general reader and the student of the Holocaust both an overview and an opportunity to delve more deeply into this vast subject. The narrative in parts 1 and 2 is peppered with sources that the writers use for their statements. The bibliography near the end of the guide is annotated just enough to give the reader the gist of the material. The writers define Holocaust to include both the Jewish genocide plus the Gypsy and handicapped genocides as well. The writers carefully abide by the dictum that history is the most controversial of academic subjects and they try to provide the reader with a strong taste of that controversy. For example, in the discussion of the term "holocaust" the authors give four definitions of the term.

Part I provides an overview of the Holocaust. The authors start in 1933 and end in 1945. Both the aftermath and legacies are discussed to the present. Some suggested changes include: In the discussion of forced labor the authors do not make it clear that five to seven million gentiles came under this system. The reader might think all forced labor was Jewish. In explaining foreign policy (page 5) the democracies allowed Hitler to build up due to their exhaustion from World War I and their fear of communist expansion. This was left out in the discussion. The writers in this section and the others embolden major people, places and terms that they explore more thoroughly in their "Encyclopedia" section.

Part 2, "Problems and Interpretations" has a number of subsections. They include the Gypsies, the handicapped, Polish and Soviet civilians, political prisoners, dissenters and homosexuals. These are handled lightly. The roots of the Holocaust, the history of the victims (Jews and Gypsies) the history of prejudice, how the final solution came about, the argument over functionalists versus intentionalists and synthesizers (whether the Holocaust was planned from 1933 on) are explained. There are short chapters dealing with the behavior of the perpetrators, the victims and the bystanders. In the section on scholars and students, William D. Rubinstein gets a great deal of attention while Daniel Goldhagen is given short shift. Goldhagen's foil is none other than Norman Finkelstein. However the latter's highly negative book, *The Holocaust Industry* is left out. Also ignored is Peter Novick's controversial book, *America and the Holocaust*. Inclusion of these would have dramatized the debatable nature of the subject.

Parts 3 and 4 deal with chronology and people places, terms and organizations. Whereas this writer has very little to argue with in parts 1 and 2, quite a number of events essential to understanding the Holocaust, in my view, were left out. I had the advantage of comparing Niewyk and Nicosia's chronology with those published by the United States Memorial Museum in Washington entitled "Fifty Years Ago: Days of Remembrance: 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995", which dealt with the years 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945 respectively. In the "Encyclopedia" section I could compare the people places, and terms with my own work *Dictionary*

of the Holocaust: Biography, Geography and Terminology. What follows are just a few events which I think should have been included:

1938 - October 5: Heinrich Rothmund of the Swiss Federal Police suggests to the Gestapo that German Jews have a large red "J" on their passports

December: British Cabinet approves of a Kindertransport which will admit 10,000 German, Austrian and Czech Jewish children to England.

December 3: All Jewish industries, shops and businesses are Aryanized in Greater Germany.

December: Jewish refugees begin flight to Shanghai where they admitted by Japanese without restrictions.

1941-November-March Dictator Antonescu of Romania assigns Transnistria, a large area in the southern Ukraine conquered from the USSR, as a penal colony for Jews. Jews massacred there

1942-May 4: Mass gassing of Jews begins at Birkenau

May 21: Monowitz, an adjunct camp of Auschwitz opens to service plant of I. G. Farben

1943- March 17: Bulgarian Parliament and king refuse deportation of their Jews from Bulgaria proper.

July 26: Jan Karski, courier of the Polish Home Army, gives his report to President Roosevelt on the plight of Polish Jews.

September 24: Abba Kovner organizes Jewish partisans to fight in forest outside Vilna.

1944- April 16: Roundup of 320,000 Hungarian Jews form transport to Auschwitz begins.

May 10; Himmler orders all remaining ghettos dismantled

May 15: Gypsy camp at Auschwitz liquidated, 6000 murdered.

June 12: Formal acceptance of nearly 1000 mainly Jewish refugees to Fort Ontario in Oswego New York.

Sept 26: Jewish Brigade formed as part of British Army. It instigates secret flight of Jews to Palestine known as Bricha.

December to May 8 1945; Death marches

1945-April 22-May 7: Bipartisan US congressional delegation visits liberated concentration camps at the re-

quest of General Eisenhower.

August 3: Harrison Report to President Truman condemns treatment of Jewish displaced persons

The emboldened people, places and terms above are those that should have been described in the "Encyclopedia." There were many more I would suggest but I leave the rest to the judgment of the authors. The student of the Holocaust would have to refer to the very comprehensive works of Abraham and Hershel Edelheit's *History of the Holocaust: A Handbook and Dictionary* and Israel Gutman Ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* or David Hogan Ed., *The Holocaust Chronicle* for more complete, inclusive information.

Part five discusses resources. The writers include printed sources electronic sources, filmography, Holocaust organizations, museums and memorials. An appendix provides tables of statistics and 12 relevant maps. The printed sources include reference works, books of memoirs, diaries and collections of documents. Journals also are mentioned. The printed sources expand the meaning of Holocaust to include homosexuals, and members of religious and political groups. Each entry has an explanatory caption. Contained therein are people, places, and terms that should have been included in the encyclopedia section. For example, the writers in describing Nechama Tec's book *Defiance, the Bielski Partisans* the writers (who left out Bielski) admit the group was "one of the largest and most successful partisan organizations during World War II" (p. 324) The reader who wants to find information on a certain topic must refer to the index and glean from various subsections and not assume the topic has been left out. This is the writers' most comprehensive subsection. It covers a wide range of books on the various aspects of the Holocaust including legacies and post war events.

The filmography presents captions about each film (most often now video) listed and its playing time. No attempt is made to tell the reader how to obtain the film. Vendors are absent. Readers should also know there are a number of sources for videos with suggested age levels.

The writers add some resources not usually found such as electronic sources. They present Online networks, particularly the H-Net Humanities and Social Science, also helpful are lists of Web sites. The section includes CD-Roms, major Terezin composers and songs written in ghettos, camps, and by partisans. The resource concludes with organizations, museums, and memorials both in the United States and foreign countries. Since the

writers included music, why leave out art and poetry?

The Columbia Guide is a start for the general reader and students. It covers a wide variety of information and sources. Of course, other writers may disagree with the

choices made, but the reader is given a host of places to go for greater depth. One of the work's strongest attributes is its balance and objectivity. The writers reflect their knowledge of historiography in their narration and captions so the reader understands they have no axe to grind.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-holocaust>

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